



**House Primary & Secondary Education Committee
Senate Bill 168 Proponent Testimony
Buckeye Association of School Administrators
Ohio Association of School Business Officials
Ohio School Boards Association
Alliance for High Quality Education
Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators
Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators
April 9, 2024**

Chairman Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of Senate Bill (SB) 168. My name is Paul Imhoff with the Buckeye Association of School Administrators. Joining me in answering your questions are Nicole Piscitani with the Ohio School Boards Association, Tony Podojil with the Alliance for High Quality Education and Barbara Shaner with the Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators and the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators. Katie Johnson with the Ohio Association of School Business Officials could not be here today but is in support of this testimony. Collectively, our organizations represent public school superintendents, school board members, high school principals, treasurers/CFOs and other school business officials from around the state.

We want to thank Senator Reynolds for her efforts to provide schools with educational reforms and regulatory flexibility that will allow them to operate more efficiently and

provide better educational services to children. Many of the components in SB 168 are policies our members have often recommended. We will focus our testimony on several of those key elements along with a few changes to the current version of the bill that we are requesting.

This is an incredibly consequential time for public schools and our students as we recover from the pandemic, address learning loss and prepare our students for a rapidly changing economy. To do that, we need high standards, but we also need to ensure our schools and school leaders have the flexibility to be innovative and meet the ever-evolving challenges and demands of a 21st-century economy. Just like businesses, schools also benefit by removing unnecessary and burdensome regulations while maintaining strong accountability measures.

OTES and OPES

For nearly a decade, Ohio's educators and administrators have been rated under the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) and Ohio Principal Evaluation System (OPES), which are evaluative frameworks that use a variety of inputs to assess educators and administrators and drive improvements. Lawmakers have created improvements to these vitally important systems since their inception. SB 168 builds on those prior efforts by permitting districts to pilot their own locally developed frameworks if they so choose. This change has the potential to spark unique and innovative outcomes that could become a new model for districts across the state. However, there are some specific components that need further adjustments in the bill.

In particular, the bill would still require multiple classroom observations; a requirement that tends to cause the greatest burden for administrators within the OTES system. Additionally, administrators report that not only are the second required observations time consuming, they believe the added time required does not result in staff improvement in most cases.

We urge the committee to amend the bill to require "at least one" observation, allowing further flexibility for districts to meet the needs of their individual staffs.

Licensure Requirements for Principals & Superintendents

SB 168 allows principals and superintendents to become licensed without the requirement to obtain a master's degree. This is a significant departure from current practice, and the proposed change has the potential to have negative results in the long run, including possibly setting up principal and superintendent candidates for failure if not properly equipped for the job.

Further, principal and superintendent preparation programs are only offered at the graduate level; there are no bachelor's degree programs for the role of principal or superintendent because it is an advanced licensure that can only be earned after the initial teaching licensure.

The principal must be able to access and utilize educational research to make critical curricular instructional and school climate and culture decisions, as well as lead effective school-wide professional development. Master's degree programs for principals include coursework about successfully navigating school change and improvement, effectively supervising employees, school finance, school law, professional ethics, human resources, developing effective school, family and community partnerships, and utilizing educational research. Each of these areas is critical to the development of effective building-level leaders.

We have seen no evidence that the requirement for a master's degree has been a deterrent for potential principal and superintendent candidates. Further, we believe that Ohio law already allows options for temporary emergency situations where no currently licensed candidates are available.

Our organizations urge the committee to remove the provision from the bill that would scale back the educational requirements for school principals and superintendents.

High-performing district exemptions

Districts that achieve high marks on the state report card are currently eligible for exemptions from various state standards, including class sizes, teacher licensure, and teacher qualifications. It makes perfect sense to reduce regulations for our high-performing districts, and SB 168 does just that by allowing eligible districts to renew their exemptions and requiring they be notified of their eligibility status. We also encourage lawmakers to consider expanding the list of exemptions to allow those districts to work more efficiently and effectively.

Temporary out-of-state teaching licenses

SB 168 codifies administrative code that permits the State Board to issue an educator license to certain qualified out-of-state educators. Our organizations are appreciative of this change but think more can be done to further simplify and streamline the out-of-state reciprocity process for educators who are licensed in their state but wish to work in Ohio schools. This is an essential step to address the teacher shortage and help districts fill vacancies with experienced professionals from other states.

Intra-District Open Enrollment Lotteries

HB 33 required that school districts who have an intra-district open enrollment lottery conduct that lottery on the second Monday in June. We are supportive of the change in SB 168 that requires the lottery to be conducted between April 1 and the second Monday in June. This allows school districts time to notify parents and make the necessary arrangements before the start of the new school year. It would also allow districts to work through a waiting list when an applicant/student's family declines a spot in a particular building.

Other important reforms

The bill makes many other important reforms, including allowing districts to provide high school courses outside the school day, rather than dictating a state-required supplemental contract to do so; removing a requirement for school boards to hold a separate hearing on their school calendar prior to the next hearing's vote; allowing districts to determine staffing for nonteaching employees, a feature that already applies to teachers; and providing transportation flexibility when picking up students after the end of the school day.

Taken together, we believe the provisions of SB 168 will reduce burdensome and unnecessary regulations, vest more decision-making back into local communities that know their students best, and better equip our school leaders to prepare our students for the future.

Chairman Bird and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for your time and attention. We urge you to support SB 168 and consider these additional changes. We would be happy to address your questions.